

UNITED STATES

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

FEATURE MATERIAL  
Endangered Wildlife Series  
No. 4

For Release September 3, 1967

## THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

The ivory-billed is North America's largest and rarest woodpecker; its shiny, black and white plumage, scarlet crest (in the male), and long ivory bill create an imposing appearance. Many authorities have believed it to be extinct.

The ivory-bill, frequently confused with pileated woodpeckers, which are reasonably plentiful, originally lived in swamps from southeastern North Carolina to eastern Texas. Formerly dependent for survival on deep forests of oak, gum, and cypress, they once ranged northward to the Ohio River and inhabited Florida cypress swamps; feeding on beyond and into the pine woods.

The ivory-billed woodpecker is "protected" by the Migratory Bird Treaty between the United States, Canada and Mexico; it is a Federal offense to harm or molest them. They form one of the species declared "endangered" by the Secretary of the Interior last spring.

For months the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has been tracing down sighting claims in an attempt to verify whether there were a few remaining birds. Persistent reports lent hope that allegations of their demise were premature.

And the birds were found--several pairs--in the Big Thicket country of eastern Texas.

There is hope this huge woodpecker also survives in South Carolina along the Congaree River; in northwestern Florida along the Apalachicola River; in Alabama and Mississippi along the Tombigbee River system; and in Georgia along the Altamaha. Louisiana reports of sightings may yet verify its presence there.

The bird is usually associated with other kinds of woodpeckers. Ivory-bills feed upon wood-boring insects that live in the inner bark or between bark and sapwood of dead or dying trees. They pry the bark loose with their bills, leaving areas which could not be exposed by lesser woodpeckers.

Sport Fisheries and Wildlife is trying to verify the existence of ivory-bills in areas where they have been reported. But it is easy to confuse them with the pileated; both birds are about the same size, show a lot of black and white when they fly, and are likely to be found in the big timber of swamps. The ivory-bill shows much white on its back when it is perched; so does the smaller red-headed woodpecker, but ivory-bills are larger than crows. Also, look for that big white bill, three times the size of the pileated's. Watchers can look for the pattern of black and white in the wings during flight, too; often the only view afforded is a flying glimpse.

Another thing to look for is the bird's flying pattern. The pileated bounces in flight; the ivory-bill flies in a level line. Finally, listen for call notes--the pileated sounds like a frightened hen, while the ivory-bill call is a series of toots, much like those of a child blowing a tin trumpet.

The program for safeguarding the ivory-bill unfolds like this: First, we find our bird; then we afford it every possible protection from careless shooting; finally, we save some of the big timber where it can live, through cooperation of Southeast timber companies, the U. S. Forest Service, and other Federal agencies.

Recommended timber management practices include:

1. Leaving individual overmature hardwood trees standing.
2. By-passing pockets of cypress and other trees in wet areas.
3. Cutting softwoods on a rotation basis to provide a constant source of slashings for food.
4. Preserving roost trees and nest trees.
5. Asking all woodsmen to watch for and report any ivory-bills to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Office of Endangered Species, Washington, D.C. 20240.

